

Some Crucial Distinctions in Central Brazilian Ethnology

By DAVID MAYBURY-LEWIS

1. Tapuya and Gê

By an accident of geography the fertile lowlands of the east coast of Brazil are separated by a high escarpment from the arid and comparatively inhospitable central plateau. By an accident of history these lowlands were colonised exclusively – except for the short-lived intrusions of the French and the Dutch – by Portugal, a country with no large surplus population to send into the interior and no compelling motive for exploration of it, once it had been reported that there was no mineral wealth to be found there. As a result the story of the tribes which inhabit the plateau is virtually pre-history until the middle of the eighteenth century*.

Until that time they were known to the outside world chiefly through the unflattering reports of their enemies the coastal Tupí. MARTIUS was the first man to devote scholarly attention to them and to suggest that many of them belonged to a single linguistic group, which he named the Ges (1867, I:257-8). He tended to equate these Ges (Gê) with the Tapuyos (Tapuya) which he took to be a Tupí word meaning "enemies" or "westerners" (1867, I:283, 345, 778). This equation persisted in the works of the other great German ethnographers of the nineteenth century (VON DEN STEINEN 1886; EHRENREICH 1894).

No one wrote of the Gê tribes before MARTIUS, but a number of writers going as far back as the sixteenth century have mentioned the Tapuya. If we accept that the Gê were Tapuya or that the Tapuya were Gê, then we must consider these earlier sources as providing the first information on the Gê tribes. This would be an important consideration, for it is now fairly well established that some tribes known as Tapuya were driven from the Brazilian

* This paper is based on research carried out in 1957-59. I am grateful to the Emslie Horniman Anthropological Scholarship Fund which financed my work among the Shavante and also to the Brazilian Government which made a contribution toward my research expenses.

littoral into the interior by the great migrations of the Tupí (SAORES DE SOUSA 1938/1587¹, MÉTRAUX 1927).

It is difficult, unfortunately, to establish exactly to whom the term *Tapuya* referred. Earlier writers such as FERNÃO CARDIM (1939/1584), SOARES DE SOUSA (1938/1587) and VASCONCELLOS (1863/1663) applied it to a heterogeneous array of tribes which had only one thing in common, that they were not Tupí. In fact SOARES DE SOUSA used the term so indiscriminately that he probably included in this category peoples who were Southern Tupí (SCHULLER 1913:80). LOWIE, in an excellent summary of the literature on the Tapuya, concludes that *Tapuya* "is a blanket term like 'Digger Indian' or 'Siwash' in North America" and that it "should be eliminated from scientific usage" (1946:566). In this he is undoubtedly correct, but it still leaves the problem unsolved as to whether any of the so-called Tapuya tribes could be identified as Gê.

SCHULLER (1913) argued that BARLAEUS' Tapuiyae (1647) were not Gê but much of the cogency of his paper derives from the fact that he concentrated on the differential criteria to the exclusion of those traits which suggest similarity between the groups. The accounts of Dutch travellers who ventured into the interior during the first half of the seventeenth century when Holland had a foothold in north-eastern Brazil mention a remarkable number of features which the Tapuya had in common with the Gê. A certain JACOBUS (or JOHANNIS) RABBUS (or RABIUS) is reported to have spent four years among the Tapuya and later to have acted as official interpreter between them and Prince MAURICE OF NASSAU (BARLAEUS 1647:258). It is on his descriptions of Tapuya life that the accounts of BARLAEUS and MARCGRAVE (1648) are based.

Both state that the Tapuya were nomadic people who lived by hunting and on the gathering of roots and wild honey; that they built rude, temporary shelters to live in, and that they delighted in contests such as running, wrestling or racing with logs on their shoulders, (BARLAEUS 1647:250-1; MARCGRAVE 1648:279-80). MARCGRAVE'S description of log-racing and moving camp could well have been based on contemporary observation of a tribe such as the Shavante. Other traits which the Tapuya of these accounts share (but not exclusively) with modern Gê tribes are the use of the earth oven, the communal hunt, the custom of shouting advice and exhortation to the village at dawn and at dusk, the custom of groups of young men's going singing round the village at dusk and the custom of incising oneself with fish-teeth until the blood flows, in order to become strong.

But the counter indications are also striking. The ethnographic points which SCHULLER made against the Tapuya-Gê thesis (1913:84) are not the most telling ones. Gê tribes are not, for instance, invariably shy of the water. They do not usually make boats, but perhaps for that reason are generally excellent swimmers. Nor does it follow that because a Tapuya chief sent men to meet ROVLOX BARO on horseback (BARO 1651:215), these Tapuya could not have been Gê. It is true that the Gê were supposed to be ignorant of the

¹ Wherever two dates are cited as in this case, the first one refers to the volume consulted and the second to the actual time at which the piece was written.

use of horses and that some Shavante were terrified of them only a decade ago. But such ignorance or fear can be overcome in a very short space of time by a group to whom horses become available. It is much more significant that, according to these sources, the Tapuya used hammocks which most Gê tribes have not adopted even to this day.

Further, the institutions of these Tapuya, as opposed to their mode of life, seem quite alien to what we know of the modern Gê. Their chief, for example, exercised real authority, both temporal and spiritual in a way quite unlike the chiefs of modern Gê communities. He ceremonially deflowered girls at puberty, a custom which has no analogue among the Gê to-day. He was a shaman and the technique of shamanism among these Tapuya involved the use and inhaling of tobacco fumes, a procedure typical of the Tupi but unknown among the Gê, who were ignorant of tobacco. The Tapuya brewed alcoholic drinks out of honey, yet the Gê of today had no alcohol of any sort until they were tempted to start drinking the raw spirit which Brazilian backwoodsmen brew from sugar-cane in the interior. Nor, as LOWIE pointed out (1946:555), do the horticultural rites described by BARLÆUS (1647:258) seem to be consistent with that writer's own description of the Tapuya as subsisting on hunting and gathering, and they are certainly not characteristic of any known Gê society.

Table 1

Correspondence between Tapuya and Gê traits

Tapuya traits shared only with Gê	Tapuya traits shared with Gê and non-Gê	Tapuya traits not shared with Gê
Log-races	Nomadism	Hammocks
	Construction of small shelters to live in	Intoxicants
	Communal hunt	Tobacco
	Delight in running and wrestling	Ceremonial defloration of virgins by the chief
	Preponderance of roots in the diet	Shamanistic rites involving tobacco
	Importance of wild honey in the diet	Horticultural rites
	Earth ovens	
	Custom of bleeding oneself to be strong	
	Custom of shouting advice to the village at dawn and at dusk	
	Custom of young men's singing round the village	

I have set out these indications in table I. I conclude from them that these Tapuya were not identical with the Gê, though they shared a large number of cultural traits with them. An interesting passage in HERCKMANS (1879:366/1639) offers a clue to the relationship between Tapuya and Gê. He wrote ²:

"The Tapuya sometimes come out of their land to the southernmost frontiers and boundaries of Brazil, chiefly whenever the summers are dry, for (then) they have not much to eat in their own country, whereas they themselves consider the southernmost regions of Brazil to be better, healthier and more fruitful than their own land ..."

This suggests that the Tapuya may well have been expatriates who thought longingly of the richer forest lands from which they had been driven, presumably by the migrating Tupí.

LÉVI-STRAUSS probably had similar considerations in mind when he wrote (1944:45):

"There is no savannal culture. The savannal culture is but an attenuated replica of the silval. Pre-horticultural people as well as gardeners would have chosen the forest as a dwelling place, or stayed in the forest, if only they had an opportunity to do so. If the savannals are not in the forest, it is not on account of a savannal culture of their own; it can only be because they were driven out of it. In this way were the Gê driven toward the interior by the great migrations of the Tupí."

While this may be true for the Tapuya discussed above and perhaps also for the Kaingang in the far south of Brazil (HENRY 1941), it does not seem to hold for the Northern and the Central Gê. NIMUENDAJÚ wrote of the Timbira (Northern Gê) that "the true home of the Timbira people lies in the arid steppe: only there – not in the primeval Amazonian forests – was it possible for the peculiar Timbira culture to evolve" (1946:2). On the basis of my experience among the Shavante and the Sherente, I am inclined to agree with him. Certainly these Gê peoples are not only expert at exploiting the savannah, but express a strong preference for it and for open country in general as opposed to the forests. Indeed their word for close country could also be translated as "bad country" ³. The inhabitants of a certain Sherente village which I studied in 1955 and re-visited in 1963 were occupying well forested land eminently suited for cultivation by slash-and-burn techniques, yet they apologised repeatedly for "living in the jungle like monkeys" and not building their villages out in the open like true Sherente ought to do. It so happened that the other Sherente villages which were still built out in the open suffered chronically from their insufficient harvests. I believe that it was partly due to their antipathy to the forest that many people deserted the former village, so that it had only a handful of inhabitants when I returned eight years later.

It could be argued of course that even if the Gê tribes had been driven from the coast into the interior, they would have had plenty of time by now to adapt themselves to their new environment. Such an argument would in

² My own translation from the Dutch.

³ *Ro wasté-di*, from *Ro* "things in general" (here "nature in general, countryside") + *wasté* "horrible".

effect discount modern ethnographic evidence as irrelevant and oblige us to rely solely on the historical facts of the matter. Yet it is precisely the historical facts which are in dispute. I tend instead to agree with HAEREL (1952:976) that there is no evidence either historical or ethnographic which would lead us to suppose that the Gê were driven inland from the coast. It seems clear that some tribes were and that certain of these were the ones designated by the blanket term *Tapuya*. They in turn were not Gê but were located between the well documented Tupi of the coast and the then virtually unknown Gê of the interior.

2. Shavante and Sherente

The Shavante and the Sherente⁴ are now two distinct peoples. There are about 1500 Shavante (certainly not more than 2000) in eastern Mato Grosso along the Rio das Mortes and by the headwaters of the Rio Batovi. The 330 odd remaining Sherente occupy a number of small villages in the *município* of Tocantinia, between the Tocantins river and the Rio do Sono.

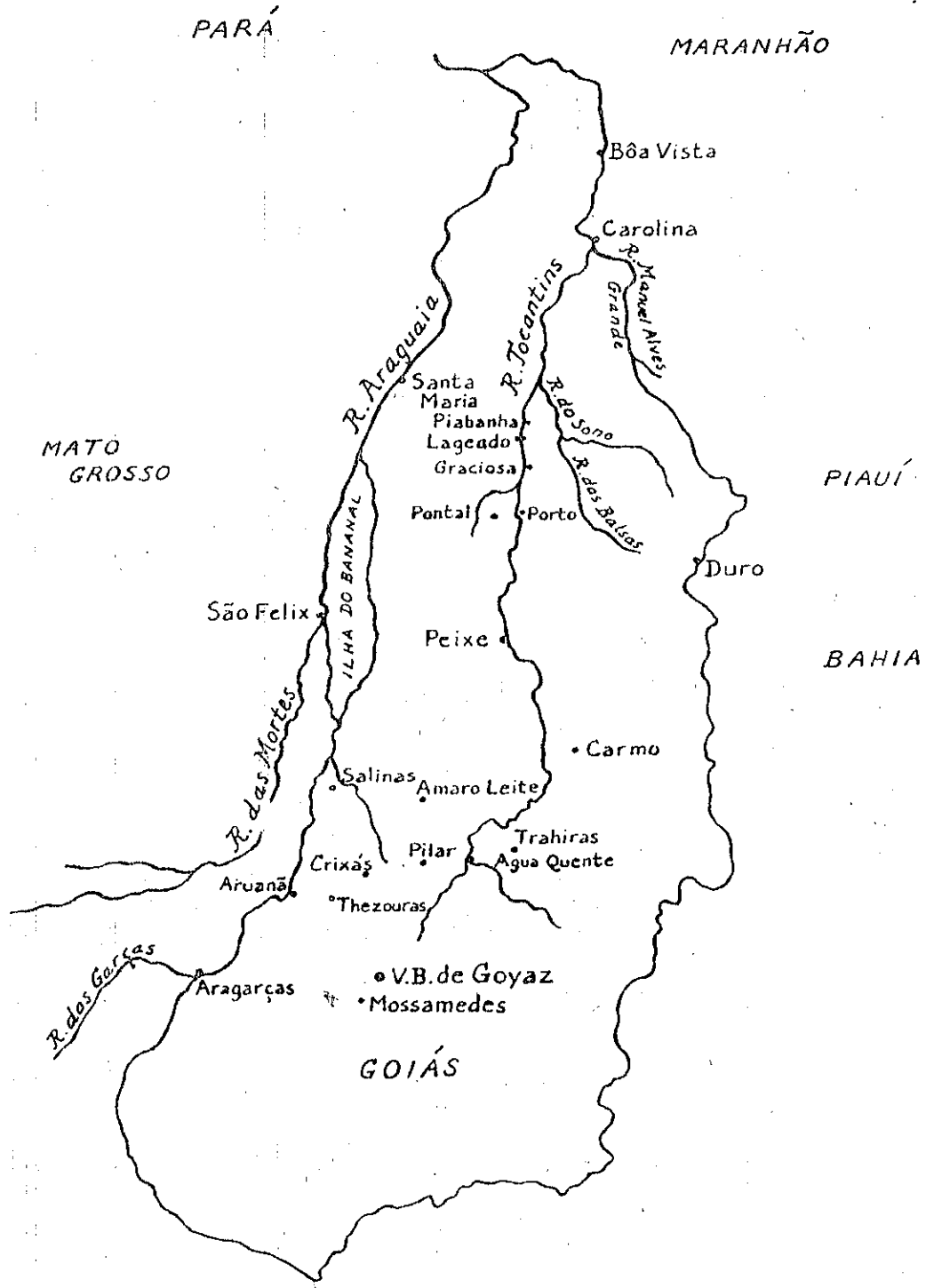
All historians are agreed that the Shavante once lived in what is now the state of Goiás (originally the Province of Goyaz) and that at that time they were in close touch with the Sherente. The nature of this contact is difficult to determine, however. They have been referred to as allied tribes (ALENCASTRE 1865:92-97). The Shavante have been called a sub-tribe of the Sherente (CASTELNAU 1850, I:352). The Sherente have been described as a sub-group of the Shavante (POHL 1832:165 and MARTIUS 1867, I:275). It has been argued that they occupied adjoining territories (POHL) and that they occupied the same territory (MATTOS 1875:18-19/1824); that they were "essentially one in speech and custom" (NIMUENDAJÚ 1942:2) and that they spoke different languages (MARTIUS 1867, II:135-142).

In this section I shall try to investigate the nature of the relationship between Shavante and Sherente, to date their definitive separation, and to suggest the reasons for it. This task is an essential preliminary to a comparative study of the Gê tribes⁵ and until such an analysis has been undertaken it is useless to speculate about the processes which might account for the present differences between Shavante and Sherente institutions.

The Gê tribes have occupied Central Brazil for as far back as we know (MASON 1950:288). Yet, since I have argued that the reports on the Tapuya do not refer to the Gê proper, we have no historical information about them earlier than the eighteenth century. They first appear in the chronicles as offering resistance to the Portuguese pioneers who were opening up the Province of Goyaz.

⁴ The Brazilian Portuguese spellings of these names are respectively Xavante or Chavante and Xerente or Cherente.

⁵ Such a study is now being carried out under my direction by members of the Harvard-Central Brazil research project.



Historical map of the state of Goiás and its environs, showing location of settlements in the 18th and 19th centuries.

[Scale 1 : 7 000 000 (1 cm = 70 km)]

Expeditionaries from São Paulo founded the city of Villa Boa de Goyaz in 1727 and very soon the news of gold in the region started a rush from the coast. West of the city of Goyaz the pioneers clashed with the Kaiapó, north of it they came into contact with the Shavante. Crixás, Trahiras, Agua Quente and a number of other settlements were established in the 1730's on the edge of the territory over which the Shavante ranged (see map). In 1736 Goyaz received a permanent garrison and in 1738 the mining settlement of Pontal was founded deep in Shavante territory (ALENCASTRE 1864:41-64).

By this time too the settlers were involved in a series of massacres and counter-massacres with the Kaiapó to the west. They were the Indians who posed an immediate threat to the city and to the very existence of the Province. In 1741 ANTONIO PIRES DE CAMPOS led an expedition against them, together with some Bororo who had allied themselves with the Portuguese, and managed to chase them away to the west (ALENCASTRE 1864:78-80). Twenty years later there was fighting between the Spaniards and the Portuguese in Mato Grosso and the Kaiapó were frightened back towards Goyaz, where they took up their previous feud with the settlers (ALENCASTRE 1864:160) and once again began to figure in despatches as the most dangerous Indians in the area (DE MELLO 1920a:61-64/1760).

Meanwhile there is a reference to the Shavante in a letter from the governor of Goyaz (SÃO MIGUEL 1920:47/1756). Following the customary *exposé* of the scandals, financial and otherwise, of his predecessor's administration he mentions an *aldeia*⁶ established no less than 200 leagues (about 1200 km) north of Villa-Boa de Goyaz, which requires protection from the Shakriabá, the Akroá and the Shavante. Four years later the Shavante are bracketed with the Kaiapó as threatening the Province from the west (DE MELLO 1920b:72/1760) and during the following decade they harassed and attacked most of the settlements of the region, from Thezouras in the south right up to Pontal and Matanças in the north, whose inhabitants were massacred four times (DE MELLO 1920c/1762; 1920d/1764; 1920e/1765 and ALMEIDA DE VASCONCELLOS 1920:96/1774). So persistent were their depredations that the governor of Goyaz hinted darkly that the Spanish Jesuits were instigating them (DE MELLO 1920c:83/1762). In 1773 a punitive expedition was sent against them to relieve the pressure on Pontal, but it was ambushed and its leader killed (SILVA E SOUSA 1874:456/1812).

NIMUENDAJÚ has pointed out that this violent hostility was not the senseless barbarity which some writers (e. g. SILVA E SOUSA 1874/1812) held it to be. Contemporary conditions in Goyaz and the type of pioneer who was attracted to the goldfields made it virtually impossible for the Indians to have peaceable relations with the whites. ALENCASTRE sums up the period when he writes (1864:328, this translation taken from NIMUENDAJÚ 1942:6-7):

⁶ The Portuguese word *aldeia* means approximately "village". It was used by writers until the nineteenth century in the special sense of a village where Indians had been settled by the administration, and it has this meaning throughout this paper.

"The newly discovered areas are battlefields on which gangs try to exterminate each other for a few fathoms of land if they surmise a vein of ore. The new settlers commit deeds so inhuman that the cruelty of the savages cannot bear comparison with it. Never was the clerical pasture land administered by more degenerate priests nor have ever been seen missionaries of worse character in apostolic capacity."

The proof that these hostilities were largely forced on the Indians by the settlers lies in the fact that whenever the central administration made an effort to win over the natives it was almost invariably successful. We have seen that the Bororo were prepared to campaign with the Portuguese against the Kaiapó. By the end of the 70's large numbers of Kaiapó were willing to march with the Portuguese against the Shavante. The experiment of trying to befriend the Kaiapó had led to the foundation of the *aldeia* Maria I, where large numbers of the tribe had been settled in 1778 (SILVA E SOUSA 1874:459). So, when the Shavante attacked the road to the salt mines between Crixás and Salinas in 1784 and the usual frantic appeals for help reached the governor in Goyaz, he decided to send out an expedition to bring the Shavante in and resettle them.

The expedition was accompanied by a number of Kaiapó allies who, it was hoped, would be able to act as interpreters. It contacted the Shavante who were understandably suspicious of its motives, especially as they were expecting reprisals for their last attack. Its commander soon saw that he was unable to persuade any of them to accompany him, so he had his Kaiapó auxiliaries capture a lone Shavante and some women and took them back with him to Goyaz (FREIRE 1951:13-15/1790).

These Shavante were made much of at the capital. The man was baptised with the name of the governor himself (Tristão da Cunha Menezes). He returned the following year to his astonished compatriots who had never expected to see him again and was from that time onwards the most important agent of the Portuguese with his own people.

Even so, the Shavante suspicions died hard. Tristão kept his first rendezvous with the Portuguese near Amaro Leite in 1786 only to tell them that he still hoped to persuade his people to come in and accept resettlement. He suggested that the government start preparing an *aldeia* for them to occupy the following year. The governor kept his part of the bargain and in 1787 he sent yet another expedition to meet the Shavante near Amaro Leite. This time a large body of Shavante tried to take the troops unawares in the hope of wiping them out.

A curious light is cast on these protracted negotiations by FREIRE's report that Shavante suspicions of the Portuguese were encouraged at this time by some of the Akroá Indians⁷ who had accompanied the expedition as interpreters (1951:16/1790). This offers a striking parallel with the difficulties of the Brazilian Indian Protection Service in trying to establish peaceful relations with Shavante groups in the twentieth century. At that time their

⁷ The Akroá were closely related linguistically to the Shavante and the Sherente (see NIMUENDA)Ú 1942:1-2). They became extinct in the late eighteenth century.

Sherente interpreters did more harm than good. A passion and a talent for intrigue seem to be characteristic of the Central Gê⁸.

Eventually 38 warriors were persuaded to return with the expedition and see for themselves, on the understanding that they would go back for the rest of their people the following year. Meanwhile a certain Captain JOSÉ DE MELLO E CASTRO had been sent up north to establish a customs post on the Tocantins river and prevent gold being taken downstream to the Province of Pará. He was disconcerted to find 2000 Shavante all preparing to accept the governor's offer of resettlement. He managed to convince them that he had been sent there especially to meet them and assigned one of his dragoons to guide them south. Then he hastily despatched a messenger to warn the governor of what was happening (FREIRE 1951:16-17/1790).

The governor was acutely embarrassed. These Shavante, plus those expected to arrive from Amaro Leite, would overburden his exchequer and could not satisfactorily be fitted into the new *aldeia* prepared for them at Carretão. He therefore sent an officer north as fast as he could go. His orders were to guide the Shavante through the Province by trails which circumnavigated the settlements so as to avoid terrifying the inhabitants and perhaps provoking incidents. He was also to split up the group, sending some to Salinas and bringing the rest to the new *aldeia* at Carretão. But he got there too late. The Shavante were already in Pilar and they refused point blank to split up, saying that they had come to live with the whites not to be exiled in Salinas, which was an unhealthy spot and infested with mosquitos (ALENCASTRE 1864: 334-6 and FREIRE 1951:18/1790).

The inhabitants of Goyaz were somewhat dismayed when they realised that such a large number of Shavante were about to descend on them. They had had a particularly lean year in 1787 and they did not know how they were going to feed so many extra mouths, even if the Indians did turn out to be friendly. The governor gave strict instructions that the Indians were not to be allowed into the city which, for all its titular pomp, was little more than a village and was poorly garrisoned at that. They were to be settled at Carretão and their leaders granted a state reception in Goyaz. He was even prepared to go out personally and bar their way should his officers not succeed in preventing the Shavante from entering the city (FREIRE 1951:18/1790).

In the event the Shavante settled peacefully into Carretão and their leaders were given as impressive a reception in the name of the Portuguese sovereign as the governor could improvise. The story that the Shavante descended on Goyaz and had to be expelled by force (SILVIO DA FONSECA 1951:10) is clearly incorrect. It is difficult to see who could have expelled them without a major battle and anyway SILVIO DA FONSECA is twenty years out in dating the episode.

The beginnings of the settlement at Carretão were inauspicious. An epidemic of measles immediately killed off a large number of Indians⁹ and

⁸ As I shall show in my forthcoming monographs on the Shavante and the Sherente.

⁹ The number varies between 120 and 400 in the different accounts.

many others fled to escape the infection. Later, since Carretão was overburdened as the governor had always known it would be, many Shavante were transferred to Salinas anyway. By the end of the eighteenth century some Shavante groups may even have renewed their hostility. According to AUDRIN (1947:214) they were scourging the north of Goyaz at that time, as can be seen from the contemporary records from CARMO which contain many such entries as: "So-and-so died without sacraments, as he died at the hands of the Xauante savages"¹⁰. Worse still, when MANUEL DE MENEZES travelled upriver from Pará to Goyaz he found the inhabitants of Salinas entirely without provisions. The only food to be had in the region was some maize, brought in by a few Shavante who worked at some distance from the settlement (MANUEL DE MENEZES 1920:110/1801). If the Salinas experiment had already failed by 1800, the larger one at Carretão was little more successful. By the 1820's its numbers had dwindled to little more than 200 discontented Shavante (MATOS 1874:273/1824 and POHL 1832:31-2).

While the *aldeia* system continued to exist simply as a bureaucratic hang-over, the old pattern of Shavante-white hostility was resumed. The Shavante were involved in the razing of Santa Maria do Araguaia in 1813 (ALENCASTRE 1864:92-97) and MARTIUS reported that they were fierce and hostile at the time of his travels in 1817-20 (MARTIUS 1867:270).

It is only at this time, or in writings which refer to this time, that the name Sherente appears in the literature. There is, so far as I can discover, no reference to them before 1800. It might be supposed that they occupied the territory in the far north of the Province, bordering on Maranhão, and that therefore the Portuguese chroniclers of the early eighteenth century had only heard of the more southerly Shavante; but such an assumption does not bear historical scrutiny.

GONÇALVO PAES and MANUEL BRANDÃO explored both banks of the Tocantins as far as its confluence with the Araguaia as early as 1669 (CASTELNAU 1850-1:108). In 1673, PASCOAL PAES DE ARAUJO travelled down the Tocantins on a slave raid as far as lat. 4° S (approximately) and even provoked a counter expedition from the north to defend the jurisdiction of Pará (CASTELNAU 1850-1:108). The entire course of the Tocantins was navigated in 1723 (NIMUENDAJÚ 1939:2). In 1741 there were reports of much gold in the region of the Rio do Sono and the country between the Rio Tocantins and the Rio Manuel Alves Grande was therefore thoroughly explored (ALENCASTRE 1864:84). This is the heart of what all writers agree is "Sherente country" and to this day the Sherente are located between the Tocantins and the Rio do Sono around lat. 9° S. The customs post on the Tocantins near Pontal, which one of TRISTÃO DA CUNHA MENEZES' officers was busy founding when he blundered into the Shavante, has already been mentioned. In 1797 this post was transferred to the confluence of the Araguaia and the Tocantins (CASTELNAU 1850-1:110). It is therefore certain that the banks of the Tocantins from the mouth of the Rio do Sono right up to the confluence with the Araguaia had been *terra*

¹⁰ My translation from the Portuguese.

cognita to the Portuguese for at least a century before the Sherente, as opposed to the Shavante, were mentioned in their chronicles at all.

It is true that MARTIUS mentions the Sherente as having reduced the *aldeia* at Duro to ashes in 1789 (1867,1:277) but he does not cite the source from which he took the information and I have been unable to confirm it. ALENCASTRE writes of Kaiapó and Sherente paddlers in the flotilla of canoes that made the first commercial descent of the Araguaia-Tocantins to Pará (1865:36-40); but this was in 1806. These Indians were said to come from São José de Mossamedes, where the Kaiapó had been settled, and from Carretão. This is the first indication that there were any Sherente in the *aldeias*. Previously he had always referred to the Indians settled at Carretão as Shavante. He does specifically state that three allied tribes - Sherente, Shavante and Karajá - took part in the attack on Santa Maria do Araguaia (1865:92-97); but one may well wonder if ALENCASTRE was not himself rather confused about them. On page 94 he refers to a man as Shavante and on the following page refers to the same individual as a Sherente.

With the exception of ALENCASTRE's unreliable reports, all accounts agree that, broadly speaking, the Shavante occupied the country to the west of the Tocantins, while the Sherente roamed the lands to the east. MARTIUS, following CASTELNAU, located the Sherente on the east bank of the Tocantins from Peixe downstream as far as Carolina (MARTIUS 1867, 1:276; CASTELNAU 1850-1,II:116) and added that their villages were scattered throughout the country between the Lageado rapids and the Rio das Balsas. This confirms SILVA E SOUSA's report (1874:496/1812) locating them between the same rapids, where they were accustomed to ambush travellers, and Duro in the east. According to both MARTIUS and CASTELNAU they were feared as wild and dangerous nomads right into the states of Maranhão, Piauí and Bahia. However, in the region of the Tocantins, that central artery of Goyaz, the Shavante and the Sherente were clearly difficult to distinguish.

We have seen that CASTELNAU thought the Shavante were a sub-tribe of the Sherente. POHL, on the other hand, stated that in 1819 the Sherente no longer existed as a distinct people. Instead he gave a location for the Shavante which extended right over into what other writers had called Sherente territory. Finally he wrote that the Shavante were known as Sherente in the east near Duro. MATROS had had some dealings with the Sherente and had personally settled some of them into an *aldeia* at Graciosa; yet even he could not be very precise about the difference between Shavante and Sherente. He claimed that they were different polities and therefore lived in different villages, but that both tribes occupied the same territory (1875:18-19/1824). MARTIUS' version was somewhat different again. He wrote of the Sherente (1867,1:275): "These Indians may conveniently be regarded as the eastern outposts or fringes of the Shavante. They themselves acknowledge that they are related to them and seem to have broken away from them only a short while ago"¹¹.

The sources all indicate, then, that there was some difference between the

¹¹ My translation from the German.

Sherente and the Shavante in the early nineteenth century, but they differ as to the nature of this difference. Contemporary ethnographic reports do not help. They are so sparse as to be useless as criteria for establishing such distinctions. Besides, it seems to have struck most contemporary and subsequent writers that Shavante and Sherente customs were indistinguishable. MARIUS used comparative vocabularies to show that Shavante and Sherente were separate languages of the Gê family (1867, II:135-142). I have analysed these vocabularies in the light of my knowledge of Sherente and Shavante as they are spoken to-day and come to the conclusion that there is an extraordinarily high degree of correspondence between them (MAYBURY-LEWIS, in press). In fact, on the evidence of these lists alone it is not possible to say that the two tribes were linguistically discrete at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

All that it is possible to establish is that these tribes were at that time virtually indistinguishable in speech and custom, but that they considered themselves to be distinct polities and were recognized as such by travellers and chroniclers. It seems likely, therefore, that MARIUS is right and that the schism between the Shavante and the Sherente was of comparatively recent date in 1817-20.

Since then they have drawn further and further apart till, about the middle of the nineteenth century, the Shavante crossed over to the western side of the Araguaia river. The separation of the tribes and the dramatic antithesis of their subsequent histories – with the Shavante hostile and remote in the unexplored regions of Mato Grosso, while the Sherente remained peaceably surrounded by settlers in northern Goiás – has given rise to much romantic speculation about the reasons for the Shavante withdrawal.

I have already argued that the Shavante are unlikely to have harboured a traditional enmity against the settlers on the grounds of a forcible expulsion from Villa Boa de Goyaz in the late eighteenth century. Many writers have taken the view, however, that their hostility was due to the maltreatment they had suffered in the *aldeias*. Certainly the tale of misdeeds and mismanagement in these settlements made this an attractive hypothesis. The clearer sighted administrators of the Province of Goyaz in the nineteenth century were well aware of the deficiencies of the *aldeia* system and on occasion published summaries of them without managing to get anything done about it. BARATA (1848:348) suggested that the Shavante *aldeias* failed because they were established in a region which the Indians did not know and could not exploit, instead of much further north between the Tocantins and the Araguaia where they could always have taken care of themselves. He further pointed out that the *a priori* reasons customarily invoked to account for the failure of the *aldeias* in general (that Indians were barbarians, incapable of sedentary existence) did not always apply. If some *aldeias* succeeded where others failed, then it must be because of special contingent circumstances, not because of any inherent defect in the system or in the Indian character.

Some of these circumstances were admirably summed up in a report by the Director-general of Indians in Goyaz (MAYA:1857) which specifically attributes the failures at Carretão and Salinas to the following causes:

"The choice of unsuitable locations which neither favoured the customs which the Indians acquire nor were endowed with the resources which they had in their primitive villages; the lack of a really religious, intelligent and paternal administration; finally the cruelties to which the Indians of the first of these two *aldeias* were subjected and the persecutions which were similarly practised a few years ago by certain subordinate officials on both rivers"¹².

Finally, the most compelling reason for the extinction of the *aldeias* was the fact that during the nineteenth century the Indians in what had come to be the State of Goiás became less and less of a force to be reckoned with and more and more of a nuisance to be dealt with. The *aldeia* system was defended in the eighteenth century as being politically astute. It turned enemies into friends and swelled the number of "settlers" in the Province. By the middle of the nineteenth century it had come to be regarded as an unnecessary drain on the public purse, and it was attacked as morally wrong in that it encouraged Indians to live in idleness as government wards instead of fending for themselves. The financial aspect of this transition has been documented from the state archives by LINCOLN DE SOUZA (1953:14-15). He shows how interest in and support for the *aldeias* in particular and the Indians in general steadily declined, until in 1905 the state of Goiás allocated the equivalent of approximately U. S. \$ 30.00 in its annual budget to all Indians resident there.

The withdrawal of the Shavante cannot, however, be explained in terms of the *aldeias* alone. Not all Shavante were resettled and some Indians, such as the Sherente, may have been involved in the resettlement without retreating into implacable hostility.

NIMUENDAJÚ, who subscribed to the theory of Shavante rancour stemming from the *aldeias*, argued that the Sherente were only involved slightly, if at all, in these experiments (1942:6-7); but this is by no means certain. Since the name *Sherente* only appears in the literature after the establishment of the *aldeias* it is quite possible that some Indians resettled as Shavante would have been called Sherente a century later. In fact some nineteenth century writers, and not only ALENCASTRE, do mention Sherente as well as Shavante in the notorious *aldeia* at Carretão (LUSTOSA 1886:38/1827; BRASIL 1927:198).

It is further clear that the cruelties perpetrated against the Indians were not confined to those resident in the *aldeias*. The Sherente are again a case in point. Colonel LUSTOSA who disliked them heartily wrote in 1827 that they were customarily treated with inhuman cruelty (1886:36-38). GARDNER reported that they were uncompromisingly hostile at the time of his travels (1836-41) and that they terrorized the region between the Tocantins and Duro, being feared even in Piauí and Bahia (1846:298-300, 315-320).

Let us summarize the evidence so far. The names Shavante and Sherente refer to a body of Indians in northern and central Goiás. There are no satisfactory criteria which enable us to distinguish Shavante from Sherente at the turn of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless all the sources are agreed that such a distinction could and should be made. Generally speaking, references to the

¹² My translation from the Portuguese.

Shavante concern Indians of this group to the west of the Tocantins while references to the Sherente concern Indians of this group to the east of it. The Shavante-Sherente were persistently hostile to the Brazilians from the mid eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, although there were short interludes when amicable relations were established with some of them. At some time in the nineteenth century the Shavante abandoned their habitat and moved south westwards into Mato Grosso.

As for the Sherente, it will be remembered that MARTIUS thought that they had only recently separated from the Shavante in 1817-20. He was also of the opinion that they had "not very long ago" pushed eastwards out of the central part of their territory (1867, I:277). NIMUENDAJÚ quoted Sherente tradition to the effect that they had once lived to the east of their present habitat and that they had therefore repeatedly invaded the region to the east of them until the middle of the nineteenth century (1942:94). It seems then that the Sherente were involved in an eastward movement at about the same time as the Shavante were moving westwards. In effect, both tribes were moving away from the Tocantins river in the early nineteenth century. Since the river was the main artery of colonization in the Province and the colonists founded their settlements on or near to it, I suggest that the Indian withdrawal from this area was a simple response to the influx of outsiders.

The Sherente could not move eastwards indefinitely. The colonists were not only occupying Goyaz from the south along the Tocantins, but they were also coming in two other streams, one westwards across Bahia and the other north westwards across the corner of Piauí to that part of Maranhão which lies east of the Tocantins and the Manuel Alves Grande. The Sherente were probably hemmed into a region roughly corresponding to the triangle between the Tocantins and the Manuel Alves Grande.

The Shavante on the other hand could and did retreat into the virgin lands to the west. It is quite likely that they finally crossed the Araguaia river in order to get away from the settlers, who were now too numerous for them and were progressively controlling all the lands between the Tocantins and the Araguaia.

The riddle of Shavante intractability proves thus to have a simple answer. They could maintain their hostility simply because they were geographically able to do so. The Sherente, hemmed in as they were, were obliged to seek some *modus vivendi* with their unwelcome neighbours. It is even possible that the very distinction between Shavante and Sherente was created in this way, namely by an undifferentiated group of (Shavante/Sherente) Indians being split into westerners and easterners by the pattern of colonial settlement along the Tocantins and subsequently kept apart by the interposition of the colonists.

One of my Shavante texts¹³ describes how in the old days the Shavante lived cheek by jowl with the whites; but when a settler seduced a Shavante

¹³ This was taken down by a Shavante who had been trained by the Mission at São Marcos, Mato Grosso. I am particularly grateful to a lay brother, ADALBERT HEIDE, for making it available to me.

woman, the Indians became afraid that they would be killed and their women stolen from them. They therefore fled by night. Later, as they were crossing a big river¹⁴ a huge manatee surfaced separating those on the far bank from those on the near bank. Those on the far bank went on, but those on the near bank returned and were absorbed by the settlers. Similarly an Apinayé legend relates how the Apinayé (western Timbira) acquired their separate identity by crossing the Tocantins and thereby losing touch with the eastern Timbira (NIMUENDAJÚ 1939:169-170). Whether or not there is any truth in these stories, they attest to the fact that, in the mind of these peoples the Tocantins was a major divide.

It remains for us to try and date this process of separation and withdrawal. LINCOLN DE SOUZA mentions that the first Shavante arrived in the *aldeia* of São Joaquim de Jamimbu near Salinas in 1848 (1953:10-11). His statement is supported by MAYA (1857) who wrote that the Shavante were "new arrivals" in the *aldeia*. We have seen that the Shavante were reported in and around Salinas ever since the mid eighteenth century, so the influx of new arrivals in the 1840's was probably connected with a general westward migration around that time. On the other hand there are a number of references to the Shavante as being much further to the north and east during the first half of the nineteenth century. RIBEIRO states that the Sherente and the Shavante harassed Maranhão from the region of the Manuel Alves Grande in 1819 (1874:64-66) and that around this time both tribes were located along the Tocantins from Pontal down to the mouth of the Manuel Alves Grande (1870:37). We have seen that MATROS placed the Shavante by the Tocantins in 1825. CASTELNAU located them between the Tocantins and the Araguaia in 1844 where they are supposed to have clashed with the Apinayé who occupied the triangle at the junction of the rivers near Boa Vista (1850,11:114-6). Some doubt is cast on his reliability, however, by his story that the Gaviões from east of the Tocantins at this latitude were treating with the Apinayé to permit them to cross the river and thus escape the attacks of the Shavante (1850,11:17-18). If the Shavante were where he first located them, then the Gaviões would have been moving towards them by crossing the river. It is more likely that they were trying to escape the Sherente, whom most authorities have as scourging this part of Maranhão. Nevertheless CASTELNAU's 1844 reference is the last notice of the Shavante in this general region.

¹⁴ This river is referred to as *É wawê*, meaning simply "Big river". It is nowadays the Shavante designation for the Rio das Mortes. The Sherente use the same term (*Ke wawê*) however to refer to the Tocantins. Clearly then it applies to the major river in the habitat of the speaker. I feel it is unlikely that *É wawê* in the text refers to the Rio das Mortes. The story describes a time long past when the Shavante were moving towards their present habitat, yet the Rio das Mortes is part of that habitat. Furthermore the Shavante are accustomed to crossing it and do not see it as a serious obstacle. They must also have crossed the Araguaia on their westward exodus, but this river is still familiar to them and their name for it is *É prê* "Red river". It seems most likely then that the river in question is the Tocantins and that the story alludes to a division of the tribe such as the one between Shavante and Sherente.

After that they presumably moved west, but it is some time before they are mentioned as being in Mato Grosso. The reports of the Directors-general of Indians in Mato Grosso (FERREIRA 1848; VIEIRA 1853; OLIVEIRA 1858; BRANDÃO 1872) make no mention of tribes in the east of that state which could be identified as Shavante. This is inconclusive since even to this day the communications of eastern Mato Grosso are with the state of Goiás rather than with the state capital at Cuiabá. The Shavante had managed to move into a no-man's-land too far west to be controlled from Goiás and too far east to be controlled by Mato Grosso.

Their whereabouts were known again by the middle of the century. SEGISMUNDO DE TAGGIA, a missionary from Salinas, sailed up the Rio das Mortes in an attempt to contact them, but the details of his expedition are wrapped in mystery and confusion. According to COUTO DE MAGALHÃES he went in 1854 and returned without meeting any Shavante (1938:197/1863). PEREIRA DA CUNHA claimed, in a report delivered to the legislative assembly of Goiás in 1856, that TAGGIA sent an emissary to one of the Shavante villages, and that the man was turned back, being told that the Christians¹⁵ were very wicked and had inflicted numerous tortures on the Shavante in Carretão. This fourth-hand report seems too highly coloured to be true, although it is just possible that TAGGIA's party might have come up with some renegade Shavante with whom they could communicate. At all events, by 1862 the Shavante were well enough known in those parts for COUTO DE MAGALHÃES to be told in Aruanã that smoke to the south meant Kaiapó, smoke to the north Canoeiro and smoke to the west meant Shavante (1938:99/1863).

It seems then that the separation of Shavante and Sherente occurred in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, but that they continued to live in close proximity to each other for at least another twenty years. In the 1840's the Shavante were probably already moving westward *en masse*, although there is still a reference to them as being in the north of Goiás. Finally in 1862 they are located in eastern Mato Grosso and we have at last an indisputable criterion for distinguishing between Shavante and Sherente – a distance of 500 kilometres.

8

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¹⁵ Portuguese Cristão = Christian is commonly used throughout the Brazilian interior to designate all those who are not Indians, irrespective of their religion.

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